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SONNETS FROM THE PATAGONIAN

BOOKS *by* DONALD EVANS

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DISCORDS

Two DEATHS IN THE BRONX

NINE POEMS FROM A VALETUDINARIUM

SONNETS FROM THE PATAGONIAN

Special Edition of the last title on Etruria (Italian hand-made) paper limited to 28 numbered copies, signed by author and publisher. Insert—one full sonnet written in the author's hand. \$15.00.

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Sonnets from the Patagonian

(Donald Evans)



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My dear Cornwall Hollis:

With the Allied cause crumbling away it is high time we thought of aesthetics. As a triste jest I said that to you the other day, and your reply was a plea to let you write a preface for a new edition of my forgotten Sonnets from the Patagonian. I am at last persuaded, and who but you should do the preface?

With Mitteleuropa a fact it should be apparent to any honest, thinking man that we are losing the War. Perhaps, in a larger sense, we have already lost the War and the dusk of the Anglo-Saxon is come. Then we are at last joined with the Hellenes and Latins in the descending scale, and it is the Teuton now approaching the perihelion, with the Slav, yet to conquer, in the far distance. But that is an eye-survey for eternity, and we have merely to do with the finite present. So we may still think of resistance, and not yet abandon hope of postponing defeat.

It is now the hour for the supreme test of America, and she too must fail, as our Allies have failed, before the Huns unless somewhere she can find the beauty and the strength of the human soul with which to give battle. For the first time in history it is souls, not guns, that will win the War, and remember, my dear friend, that Beauty is more necessary than food that the soul may live.

We are all but engulfed in error. We say that we do not hate the German people; it is the Kaiser we are fighting. A pitiful self-delusion! It must be the German people we hate as an overshadowing race, if our fight is to have even the excuse of the inflamed passion of the survival of the fittest. We must acknowledge the Kaiser as the symbol of the best organized form of government, unless we are frankly anarchists; the most efficient, the most powerful, the most nearly approaching a practical socialism. Let us, therefore, start afresh. We hate the German people, for they have threatened our complacent supremacy as lords of the world. Now we are at least truthful.

Thus far, the Allies have failed signally as a military force. The Europeans have forgotten how to fight, and we in America have never learned. We have put too much faith in materialism, and betrayed the Soul and-Beauty. There is more to life than living, and more to an army than arms. The moment is here that demands we scrap the military leaders, as such, and seek stronger. Why not then turn to the Poets to direct the War, for, lo! it was the Poets who in seven days won the Irish Revolution. None knows better than you how I begrudge giving the ever-turbulent West Britons any praise, any glory, but there is the simple truth. They vanquished the foe because they first had conquered fear, and then nought could stand against them.

If we could purge ourselves of our fear of Germany we should capture Berlin. Could I enlist a Battalion of Irreproachables, whose uniforms should be walking suit, top hat and pumps, and their only weapon an ebony stick, and sail tomorrow, we should march down Unter den Linden in a month, provided wrapped in our kerchiefs we carried the Gospel of Beauty, and a nonchalance in the knot of our cravats.

Verily, verily, men are killed solely because they fear death, and turn their backs on Beauty, for only ugliness and error can destroy, and ugliness in the end destroys itself.

There is really no horror in the War. Even in the ridiculous way we are now fighting it is all a shabby, stupid sham. That chap Griffith gave us a more realistic spectacle in "The Birth of a Nation." Far too few men are actually killed and wounded, and the job is much too large for the materialists. They do not know how to employ effectively the huge forces they have raised into being.

If somehow we can grope our way back to the springs of Beauty all may yet be saved, but it will require the sacrifice of everything we have. For myriads it will mean the offering of their lives, for that is all they possess, and it must be done freely, gladly, with their souls purified, if it is to avail anything. Pride, ambition, selfishness, self-will must go, or we perish blind miserables.

For myself, you know I am willingly in service as a common soldier, although some years beyond conscription age. Ungrudgingly I gave up alcohol—almost a lifelong necessity—and for months I, the Epicurean, have been dispassionately measuring the supposed hardships of war that I might truly understand what a soldier has to undergo. With Beauty in the bloodbeat privation is nothing. What can touch me now except the amusing joy of giving up for the common good? Yet who actually loves humankind less than I? But the subordination idea intrigues me, possesses me, satisfies me. How better can I prove my patent of snobbery and my innate right cordially to dislike my fellowmen?

The social degradation involved in functioning as an enlisted man was and, of course, is the worst of the annoyances. I am neither young enough nor sufficiently demo-

cratic to enjoy day after day a below-stairs status. It is a trial, I confess, but I venture to persuade myself that I do all that is required of me with admirable abasement and detachment. Occasionally, indeed, it is capital fun to play the anonymous cipher. I am often urged to obtain a commission. But I cannot quite do that, for would not that be a confession that I hadn't the pluck to stick it out? I must remain as I am. Many of my contemporaries are finding the khaki an easy means of increasing their literary reputations. Wise brothers, ye have chosen your rôles. I prefer mine.

Before you have seen my book through the press I may be dead. With all my heart I hope I shall not come back, for then impersonally I shall have fallen for a cause in which I have no faith. What more distinguished end for an incurable poseur? Have I not been called that? Plant, I beg you, mignonette to encircle my arrowroot fields.

What has all this to do with the Sonnets from the Patagonian? If you will read my words aright they will give the key to my poems, should you, my beloved Hollis, still lack a key. The volume when it first appeared was not liked by divers nice people—it was thought nasty—but none put it down till he had finished it; a terror was on him lest he miss a word. And the terror was the Sword of Beauty which slayeth all. Intrepidity

But you shall interpret the poems yourself.

DONALD EVANS.

I have broken my engagement to write a preface, but have given you, gentle Reader, the Poet's letter instead.

CORNWALL HOLLIS.

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LOVE IN PATAGONIA

To

Carl Van Vechten

LOVE IN PATAGONIA

FORGETTING her mauve vows the Fania fled,
Taking away her moonlight scarves with her—
There was no joy left in the calendar,
And life was but an orchid that was dead.
Even our pious peacocks went unfed—
I had deserved no treachery like this,
For I had bitten sharp kiss after kiss
Devoutly, till her sleek young body bled.

Then Carlo came ; he shone like a new sin—
Straightway I knew pearl-powder still was sweet,
And that my bleeding heart would not be scarred.
I sought a shop where shoes were sold within,
And for three hundred francs made brave my feet,
And then I danced along the boulevard !

PORTRAITS OF IGOR VYVYAN

To

Pitts Sanborn

IN THE VICES

GAY and audacious crime glints in his eyes,
And his mad talk, raping the commonplace,
Gleefully runs a devil-praising race,
And none can ever follow where he flies.
He streaks himself with vices tenderly ;
He cradles sin, and with a figleaf fan
Taps his green cat, watching a bored sun span
The wasted minutes to eternity.

Once I took up his trail along the dark,
Wishful to track him to the witches' flame,
To see the bubbling of the sneer and snare.
The way led through a fragrant starlit park,
And soon upon a harlot's house I came—
Within I found him playing at solitaire !

EN MONOCLE

BORN with a monocle he stares at life,
And sends his soul on pensive promenades ;
He pays a high price for discarded gods,
And then regilds them to renew their strife.
His calm moustache points to the ironies,
And a fawn-coloured laugh sucks in the night,
Full of the riant mists that turn to white
In brief lost battles with banalities.

Masters are makeshifts and a path to tread
For blue pumps that are ardent for the air ;
Features are fixtures when the face is fled,
And we are left the husks of tarnished hair ;
But he is one who lusts uncomforted
To kiss the naked phrase quite unaware.

PORTRAIT OF THE FAN FAN

Imitated from "Discords"

To

Donovan Blades

LOVING KINDNESS

Moscow

HER flesh was lyrical and sweet to flog,
For the whip blanched her blood, though every vein
Flooded with hate shot a hot flow of pain,
And her screams were muffled by a brackish fog.
He loved her, yet his passion could but fret
Unless he lashed her to an awkward rage—
But when his hand wrote terror on her page
He knew exultant joy of feigned regret.

Theirs was a bond that poured the wine of fear,
And he drained her stiffened limbs with cruel art.
He taught her that all tenderness had fled
Till she would beg the hurt to taste the tear,
And when she bent to kiss her quivering heart
It lit a Chinese candle in his head.

PORTRAIT OF MME. HYSSAIN

To

John Darby

THEATRE DU NORD

Tashkend

SHE was tired to tears, and yet there were no tears,
Only the dead seas of indifference
Meeting the languors of a nerveless sense,
For she had played the rôles for twenty years.
The queen called for her satins, while the drab
Demanded love, and the wild hunger tore;
The woman raged to touch the flame once more,
But the worn-out emotions could not stab.

There were the thousand parts she had essayed,
And the three thousand gowns that she had worn.
Into the ragbag each frock found its flight,
Crumpled and ravished of a film-proud shade,
And every script is wandering forlorn,
Gnawed by the mirage of an opening night.

PORTRAIT: IN MEMORIAM

To

Hugh Campbell

FAILURE AT FORTY

HE SAW there was no choice to left or right—
Time that had marked him for the least of sages
Pointed the hour, and several blotted pages
Stood witness to the struggle in the night.
Behind him lay a happiness that might
Have made him shine a figure through the ages ;
Before him loomed a toiling at mean wages,
Alternative to sinking out of sight.

This much was sure—he never need retrace ;
The leagues that he had travelled were an ending.
There wound no footpath to a sunlit place,
Where he might nurse his dreams, with peace attending.
No promised joy would quicken the day's pace,
Nor write the past a blunder still worth mending.

PORTRAIT OF A GENTLEMAN AND
A LADY

To

Enid Welsh

ASPENS AT CRESHEIM

SHE had become a stranger suddenly,
Just as all men were strangers; then he knew
 Why she must be an alien—even she!
Since there was nought her human love could do
To give him the last access to her soul.
Returning came his years as wholly vain—
Repeated payment of inutile toll
To reach a shrine he would not seek again.

It scarcely left him sad to find how wrong
Had been his vision of won womanhood—
This yearning ache that he had held so long
For a full mingling of their separate blood.
Freed, solitary now, with unscared eyes
He gazed anew at life safe from surprise!

PORTRAIT OF MICHAEL PETER

To

Fania Marinoff

BIRTHDAY PIECE NO. 2

THREE is what is and what there is is fair,
But most is yet to come to what is here;
Here is the most to come from out a year,
For from the year there comes all there is there.
Song for the minnow and a crystal pool,
And all is said of all there was to say,
Yet all must say the all, since every day
A nuptial kiss the wise man gives a fool.

An ear of corn from the blind red sunburnt earth
Blandly lies in the sun divinely green,
Disowning what the earth and sun have done.
Kisses and corn and a pool to crown the birth,
With once to come what never before has been,
And here is there what there is here begun.

PORTRAITS OF MABEL DODGE

To

Louis Sherwin

HER SMILE

Laggan

HER hidden smile was full of little breasts,
And with her too white hands she stroked her fears,
The while the serpent peered at her arched ears,
And night's grim hours stalked in, unbidden guests.
A noise was in her eyes that sang of scorn,
And round her voice there gleamed a nameless dread,
As though her lips were hungry for the dead,
Yet knew the food of dawn would be forlorn.

The cold hours ebbed, and still she held her throne ;
Across the sky the lightning made mad play,
And then the scarlet screams stood forth revealed.
She turned her back, and grasped a monotone ;
It answered all ; she lived again that day
She triumphed in the tragic turnip field.

THE LAST DANCE AT DAWN

Firenze

AND she was sad since she could not be sad,
And every star fled amorous from the sky.
Her pampered knees fell under her keen eye
And it came to her she would not go mad.
The gaucheries were turning the last screw,
But there was still the island in the sea,
The harridan chorus of eternity,
That let her smile because he saw she knew.

She even dared be impudent again,
And bit his ear; the deaths were far away.
A Black Mass sounded from the treasure vaults—
She tried to rouge her heart, yet quite in vain.
The crucifix danced in, beribboned, gay,
And lisped to her a wish for the next waltz.

PORTRAIT OF CARL VAN VECHTEN

To

Gertrude Stein

IN THE GENTLEMANLY INTEREST

Piccadilly

HE polished snubs till they were regnant art,
Curling their shameless toilets round the hour.
Each lay upon his lips an exquisite flower
Subtly malign and poisoned for its part.
The path of victims was no wanton plan—
He had bowed his head in sorrow at his birth,
For he had said long ere he came to earth
That it was no place for a gentleman.

But always a heart-scald lurked behind the screen,
And somehow he missed the ultimate degrees.
He saw a beggar at the daylight's fall
And then he rose and robbed him for the scene;
And when they called him cad he found release—
He felt he had used the finest snub of all.

PORTRAITS OF LOUISE NORTON

To

Donald Evans

BUVEUSE D'ABSINTHE

Rue d'Aphrodite

HER voice was fleet-limbed and immaculate,
And like peach blossoms blown across the wind
Her white words made the hour seem cool and kind,
Hung with soft dawns that danced a shadow fete.
A silken silence crept up from the South,
The flutes were hushed that mimed the orange moon,
And down the willow stream my sighs were strewn,
While I knelt to the corners of her mouth.

Lead me afar from clamorous dissonance,
For I am sick of empty trumpetings,
Choking the highways with a dusty noise.
Here I have found her sweet sheer utterance,
And now I seek the garden of the wings
Where I may bathe in sounds that life destroys.

EXTREME UNCTION

A CROSS the rotting pads in the lily lake
Her gesture floated toward the iris bed,
Wrapped in a whispered perfume of the dead,
And her gaze followed slowly in its wake.
Now was the summons come she must obey,
For Beauty pleaded from the charnel house,
For violet nights and violent carouse
To free her from the cerements of decay.

Crapulous hands reach out to strangle thee,
And every moment is a winding-sheet,
With bats to chant corruption's litany.
Be thou a torch to flash fanfaronade,
And as the earth crumbles beneath thy feet
Flaunt thou the glitter of a new brocade !

THE JADE VASE

Pittsburgh

HE had hunted for it to the alley's end,
Yet when he found the jade vase he was sad,
Low-pulsed with ennui for the praise he had
Poured into bowls that merely did not offend.
A wall of glass held back his worshipping,
And his eyes that drank this miracle of stone
Acknowledged the discovery not his own—
Still the vase was there, and that was everything.

He thought back over all the songs he had sung,
And all the hours his heart like waving grain
Had swayed to music. And the joys now dead
Seemed haunting coins to meagre beauty flung.
Poignantly he longed to call them back. In vain!
But they were the last words that the poet said.

PORTRAITS OF THE AUTHOR

To

Cornwall Hollis

EPICEDE

WISTFULLY shimmering, shamelessly wise and
weak,

He lives in pawn, pledging a battered name;
He loves his failures as one might love fame,
And listens for the ghost years as they speak.
A fragrance bright and broken clasps his head,
And wildwood airs sing a frayed interlude,
While cloaked he comes in a new attitude
To play gravedigger if the word be said.

He swore he would be glad and only glad,
And turned to Broadway for the peace of God.
He found it at the bottom of the glass,
For where the dregs lay it was less than sad,
And mid the murmur when the dance was trod
He heard the echo of a genius pass.

IN THE FALKLANDS

FOR his soul when homeless then is at home,
And in a paradise where shadows wane
He draws droll figures on the windowpane
To lure his vagrom fellow souls to Rome.
There is a potent rancour in the moon,
Hunting for those who love him still, three
Gleam back. But with detached anxiety
He vows that he will alienate them soon.

He said that love had but two words, the last
And first, and joy in flying laces lay.
He watched each kiss to kill it at stark ease—
His strangler's hands carve prayers for the past—
And chastely he spends an hour every day
Erecting tombstones to carnalities.

THE NOON OF NIGHT

THE fictive tear he holds in reverence,
And studies heady griefs that wash the cheek ;
It is a dim dominion he must seek.
To gain some raiment for his impotence.
Sorrows are numbered, the sighs have their strings,
And barren smiles are trained for tragedy ;
He ties up parcels of mock gaiety,
And labels them with many worshippings.

Grapes in the grass, and every day a waste
At scattered sources of lost loveliness,
With drunkenness to drain the ruined seats.
He knows his gems are turned to glassy paste—
But he thanks God aloof from all distress,
For he knows sewers run beneath the city streets.

FIFTH AVENUE

AND when discovery marred the best disguise
He winced a sigh, bowed to a spoiled deceit,
And donned the damask draperies of defeat
To woo dishonour as an enterprise.
His self-betrayal had its tenderness
And reared an outland refuge for his pride,
For all were baffled telling how he lied,
Since more than any guessed he would confess.

He died a hero in Fifth Avenue
One yellowed day saving a tattered man.
But in the litter of his passing breath
A prayer lay lest one should misconstrue.
It was an accident—and he began
A last profound apology to death.





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